

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON TOURISM

Minutes of Meeting
1998 Interim
December 3, 1998

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative John Travis, Cochairman of the Joint Subcommittee on Tourism, called the meeting to order at 1:25 p.m. at the Port of Lake Charles, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative John Travis,
Cochairman
Representative Dan Flavin
Representative Mickey Frith
Representative Mike Michot
Representative Gil Pinac
Representative Diane Winston
Representative Clo Fontenot (ad hoc)
Representative Dan Morrish (ad hoc)
Representative Tommy Wright (ad hoc)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Bob Barton
Representative Jean Doerge
Representative Naomi Farve
Representative Arthur Morrell
Representative Ed Murray
Representative Tank Powell
Representative Pete Schneider
Representative Sharon Weston
Representative Melinda Schwegmann
(ad hoc)

Senator Ken Hollis,
Cochairman
Senator Mike Branch
Senator Wilson Fields
Senator Francis Heitmeier
Senator Louis Lambert
Senator Mike Robichaux
Senator Mike Smith

III. STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Cindy Mancuso, House Attorney
Billy Gothreaux, Research Analyst
Sandy Painting, House Secretary
Rhoda Verret, House Sergeant at Arms

IV. DISCUSSION

Lt. Governor Kathleen Blanco, P.O. Box 44243, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804, (504) 342-7009, commended the committee for traveling the state and collecting information needed to improve tourism in Louisiana. She gave a brief overview of Francofete '99, the Louisiana Tricentennial. She spoke of the growth in tourism and the economic impact of approximately \$8 billion by the end of 1999. She attributed this growth to the marketing of Louisiana.

Mayor Willie Mount, City of Lake Charles, P.O. Box 900, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70602, (318) 491-1388, appeared before the committee and spoke of the improvements being made to Lake Charles to increase tourism and the assistance needed from the state (see attached Exhibit "A").

Ms. Shelly Johnson, Executive Director, Southwest Louisiana Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1211 W. Lakeshore Dr., Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601, (318) 436-9588, appeared before the committee and showed a brief video on Lake Charles and its tourist attractions. She thanked the committee for its support and assistance and asked the committee to support the lifting of the cap on funding for tourism advertising. She reiterated the problems mentioned in previous meetings regarding the lack of highway signs and the much needed highway improvements.

Representative Travis stated that he would be filing legislation to remove the cap on the tourism funding.

Mr. Mike Tremont, Development of Downtown Lake Charles, 901 Ryan St., Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601 (318) 439-2054, appeared before the committee and stated that he was the owner of Aunt Ruby's Bed and Breakfast and the Pujoe Street Cafe and Market. He talked about the downtown restoration of new restaurants and attractions and the effect on the growth of tourism. He stated that by being a bed and breakfast owner and restaurant owner he repeatedly heard from his customers that the friendly people was what they liked most about Louisiana. He stated that our friendliness was Louisiana's largest and most important asset and that we must strive to keep it.

Mayor Charles Reed, City of Sulphur, P.O. Box 1309, Sulphur, Louisiana 70663, appeared before the committee and stated that Sulphur had experienced a huge growth in the hotel business and that this was partly due to the gaming boats in Lake Charles. He reiterated the previous problems with the Department of Transportation and Development regarding roads improvements and lack of signs.

Ms. Marlene Hobbs, Contrabann Days Festivities, P.O. Box 679, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70602, (318) 436-5508, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of Contrabann Days. She stated that it was one of the largest festivals in Louisiana, celebrating its 42nd anniversary this year with over 100 events. She stated that McNeese State University was currently in the process of preparing an economic impact study on the entire festival including revenue from hotels and restaurants, but that records reflect that \$1.7 million was spent on the actual festival grounds.

Ms. Anne Monlezun, Mardi Gras Lake Charles, 801 Bayou Pines Dr., Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601,

(318) 478-7910, appeared before the committee and explained how the Mardi Gras organization in Lake Charles began 20 years ago. She stated that Mardi Gras in Lake Charles began with three krewes and currently has 28 krewes. She described the Mardi Gras Museum in Lake Charles which displays hundreds of costumes including the original costumes from the first krewe of 30 years ago. She stated that the Mardi Gras in Lake Charles continues to grow and the tourism revenue continues to increase.

Mr. Blane Bourgeois, Sister City Exchange-Sioux City Iowa, Krewe de Charlie Sioux, 907 S. Division, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70601, (318) 497-0031, appeared before the committee and explained how the Sister City Exchange was formed. He stated that Sioux City and Lake Charles had so much in common that several businessmen from both cities decided to incorporate Mardi Gras into Sioux City's Saturday in the Park Festival which was designed from the New Orleans Jazz Festival. He stated that the Sister City Exchange was established in 1995, and each year representatives from Sioux City participate in the Lake Charles Mardi Gras and participants from Lake Charles Mardi Gras participate in the Sioux City Saturday in the Park festival. He stated that the formation of the exchange has been an exchange of cultures and a teaching experience. He showed the committee a portion of a film of the Mardi Gras in Sioux City and provided the committee with the video. He stated that this exchange has brought the mayor and tourism representatives of Sioux City to Lake Charles and is continuing to grow and increase the tourism revenue in both cities.

Mr. Monty Hurley, Chairman, Creole Nature Trail National Scenic Byway District, P. O. Box 938, Lake Charles, Louisiana, (318) 436-3216, appeared before the committee and gave a brief history of the Creole Nature Trail which connects Cameron and Calcasieu Parishes. He stated that the Creole Nature Trail was established in 1975 and was declared a national scenic byway in 1993. He stated that the Creole Nature Trail Scenic Byway District was created in 1995 and is the only national scenic byway in the South and is the only one in Louisiana.

Captain Sammie Faulk, Vice Chairman, Creole Nature Trail National Scenic Byway District, 620 Big Lake Street, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70607, (318) 598-2001, appeared before the committee and stated that the Creole Nature Trail provides tourists with the culture of Louisiana people. He stated that it provides year-round activities for tourists such as birding, photography, fishing, hunting, walking and driving trails through the marsh, and

alligator sitings. He reiterated the previously mentioned problem regarding the lack of road signs for the nature trail and the gulf beaches.

Ms. Tina Horn, Administrator, Cameron Parish, (no address or phone number provided), thanked the committee for choosing to tour Cameron Parish and Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge the previous day.

Ms. Sandy Trenie, Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70633, (318) 437-3500, appeared before the committee and thanked the members for visiting southwest Louisiana. She stated that Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes work together and are continuing to grow because of it.

Mr. Francis J. Hidalgo, 2522 Anderson Rd., Westlake, Louisiana, (318) 433-3813, appeared before the committee and spoke of his dream to promote a major tourist attraction which would provide a steam engine from Westlake to DeQuincy (see attached Exhibit "B"). He asked the committee for its help on the funding of such a project.

Representative Travis suggested that the funding come from private investors.

Mr. Danny Young, Executive Director, Louisiana Travel Promotion Association, P.O. Box 3988, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821, (504) 346-1857, appeared before the committee and again asked the committee for its help in raising the cap on tourism advertising funding.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

The committee attended a press conference at the Best Suites of America in Lake Charles the previous day, December 2, 1998, and toured the new Southwest Louisiana Convention and Visitors Bureau in Lake Charles and the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in Grand Chenier, Louisiana.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Danny Young, Executive Director, Louisiana Travel Promotion Association, P.O. Box 3988, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821, (504) 346-1857, reminded the committee of the Louisiana Travel and Tourism Summit being held at the Radisson Hotel in Baton Rouge on January 10 through January 13, 1999, and invited all members and staff to attend.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Travis, Cochairman

Date Approved: _____